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June 13, 2019

The Honorable Donetta W. Ambrose
United States District Court
Western District of Pennsylvania
Joseph F. Weis, Jr.
U.S. Courthouse
700 Grant Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15219

Dear Judge Ambrose:

I am a restorative justice practitioner and scholar who helped to develop the field over forty years ago. Crime victims and their needs are a primary concern in restorative justice, and I have worked with many through these decades. As a result, I have frequently taught and lectured on victim issues internationally. I also served on the Victim Advisory Group of the US Sentencing Commission for a number of years.

Through my experience and research, I have found that among the many needs of crime victims are a cluster of what I have termed "justice needs." When these needs are not addressed in some way, victims' journeys to transcend their experiences are much more difficult than when they are involved and given choices in meeting these needs. In short form, these needs include the need for answers to their questions, opportunities to tell their stories, their "truths" and have them heard, opportunities to be empowered through involvement and choices, and an experience of vindication and validation.

Discussion of these "justice needs" can be found in my book, *Transcending: Reflections of Crime Victims*. (Good Books, 2001). For this book, I interviewed victims of severe crime in the United States and Canada, sharing their portraits and stories. Among my conclusions and observations, summarizing their experiences and the needs I heard, is the critical importance of obtaining meaningful answers and information:

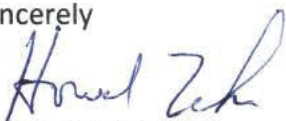
Victims want to know what happened and why, because ... answers restore the sense of order that is essential to health. They want answers that, to the extent possible, are real and not conjectured. They want answers that are as multi-layered as real life, not the simplistic, binary answers that emerge from the legal process. ... [Some answers] are factual and must come from others: "What happened? Why did it happen? What is being done about it?" (p. 193)

Unfortunately, the adversarial nature of the legal process often does not allow these needs to be met and brings a new level of trauma to those already traumatized by crime.

In order to meet these needs, in my experience, it is essential that crime victims have access to both prosecution and defense. Often the defense team has essential elements of the information they need, and victims often find it helpful to ask questions, to express their feelings and wishes, to both "sides." Trained defense-based victim outreach specialists, working from clear boundaries and guidelines, can be incredibly helpful to those going through these painful processes.

Please let me know if I can provide any additional information.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Howard Zehr". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Howard" and last name "Zehr" clearly distinguishable.

Howard Zehr, Ph.D.

Distinguished Professor of Restorative Justice

Director Emeritus, Zehr Institute for Restorative Justice